

LOB #40:

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB CONTENT

Purpose

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is on the forefront of communications change in today's world. Through social media and web content, OPA serves the County and its residents by creating, coordinating and sharing relevant, timely and actionable information through news updates, Facebook posts or Twitter updates, and thousands of fairfaxcounty.gov web pages.

OPA plays a pivotal role in creating and managing the County's social media and web presences to residents and to the world. OPA's social media and web content purpose is simple: convey the County's mission and business effectively and efficiently. Social media and web content are both independent of each other, yet connected. Social media tools feature precise ways to execute successful content in a social setting, while the website has specific processes, too. Social media and web content come together on sites such as the Fairfax County Government NewsCenter, which is a new approach to communications with a core philosophy that in today's world, government can serve as direct publishers of information.

Fairfax County's web presence is managed at the highest level by two County agencies – OPA and DIT. OPA is ultimately responsible for the content published on the public website serving as planner, creator and coordinator. The County's website is a strategic asset that is crucial to the County's success.

Description

Among the responsibilities associated with the LOB are:

SOCIAL MEDIA

OPA leads Fairfax County's successful social media presence and its purpose has been validated each fiscal year:

Facebook "reach" for all Official County Facebook Pages ("reach" means number of times County content appeared in someone's Facebook feed):

- FY 2012: 2,088,753
- FY 2013: 6,659,856
- FY 2014: 11,603,306
- FY 2015: 28,313,758

Twitter Impressions for all Official County Twitter Accounts ("impression" means number of times County content appeared in someone's Twitter feed):

- FY 2014: 14,746,461
- FY 2015: 23,550,698

On both key social media platforms, the community has expressed its satisfaction through ongoing surveys:

- Facebook satisfaction: 85 percent
- Twitter satisfaction: 84 percent

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In this same satisfaction survey, the community also has expressed the educational benefits of the County's social media presence through this question: "Have you learned more about your local government, its programs and services through our use of (Facebook/Twitter)?"

- Facebook: Yes, 82 percent
- Twitter: Yes, 74 percent

General Oversight

OPA leads the County's social media presence. From publishing content to the main County government accounts to training each agency on how best to use Facebook and Twitter, OPA's imprint is over almost every aspect of County social media. OPA leads the development of overarching strategy – explaining and educating on each social tool, as well as creating all social media accounts from Facebook pages to Twitter accounts to the police and fire news blogs. OPA plays a silent, yet critical role on-stage and behind the scenes. OPA also carefully monitors metrics of all accounts in order to sense trends, find opportunities and address struggling accounts. OPA provides constant counsel to all agencies on the best approaches to address emerging issues or planned campaigns.

Strategy and Policy

OPA recently led the completion of a new social media strategy that features six philosophies of the County's approach to social media:

1. Publish, engage and provide customer service with relevant, timely and actionable information, while promoting core services and key events.
2. Establish our voice to build confidence that we are a trusted source for information, especially during emergencies.
3. Use social media aggressively during emergencies and emerging incidents to empower information ambassadors, listen to community first informers and share critical information.
4. Listen to conversations about government services/programs and participate in individual, neighborhood, local, regional, state and/or national conversations.
5. Ensure the security of our social media accounts and prevent cyber vandalism.
6. Integrate social media with other ways to deliver and share content, such as paid, earned and owned media opportunities.

This new strategy also features cross-County coordination and requirements – all accounts must submit annual goals, as well as meet certain output standards.

Approving Accounts

Since 2010, OPA has led the process for departments to apply for social media accounts. It is not acceptable to simply allow agencies to create social media accounts. Other local governments allow accounts to be created that quickly become dormant, uncoordinated or compromised. OPA requires business cases, training, metrics checks, specific security settings and general oversight. In total, OPA has stood up 30+ Facebook and Twitter accounts in five years.

Training and Educating

Training is a crucial component of social media since the landscape changes so frequently. OPA conducts workshops with staff from each new account that has been approved in order to convey the importance and nuance of managing an official County government communications tool. OPA provides constant updates to the 50+ staff that has publishing access to official social media accounts.

Publishing and Listening

OPA serves as the publisher and voice of the County's primary social media accounts on the following platforms: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Periscope, SoundCloud, SlideShare and select blogs. This daily work requires a dedicated team effort to create and share content so the community can be further educated about Fairfax County government. OPA also plays the critical role of "eyes and ears" on social media and alerts County leadership and key stakeholders of emerging trends and conversations.

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Emergency Information

According to the County's Emergency Operations Plan, OPA is mandated as the lead communications agency during major emergencies. One primary reason OPA began using social media in 2008 was for emergencies – County information needed to be on platforms people use. Social media is absolutely critical to successful emergency and crisis communications today; otherwise, the County would be unable to share key information directly with the public. With 51 million total impressions on Facebook and Twitter for all County accounts in FY 2015, the opportunity is there and OPA has seized it year after year during major events such as snowstorms, severe summer storms and by aiding other agencies such as the Police Department during the escaped prisoner manhunt (communications for that event were successful because of social media).

WEB CONTENT

OPA plays a key, vigilant role in coordinating content and ensuring that the public can access information in a usable format without always knowing which specific agency controls the topic.

Creating and Coordinating Web Content

OPA's unique role as the County's central communications office extends to the web. OPA knows the County's big picture and conveys this on the web through timely publishing of key information. OPA has created hundreds of web pages, ensuring a consistent message that includes all County agency information on a topic. OPA coordinates content between agencies that may be working on the same topic, but not aware there are relevant web pages elsewhere. More than 200 County employees publish content to the public website. However, the level of training, the priority of web content in their job portfolios and the intuition to link to other County efforts is often inconsistent. OPA achieves coordination in three ways:

1. Facilitating (and often creating) cross-agency web content such as ad hoc police commission, bond referenda, economic success, financial transparency, bipartisan election commission, meals tax, Fairfax Alerts, Silver Line and Tysons.
2. Consulting on a daily basis with all County agencies on short and long-term web content issues. OPA has consulted with nearly every agency on web content, including agency web page redesigns for the Office of Elections, the Department of Tax Administration, Police Department, General District Court, Office of Emergency Management and the Department of Family Services, to name just a few.
3. Leading the web content review process that began in FY 2015, which systematically seeks consistency and compliance in all agencies.

User Testing and Public Involvement

Testing and assessing are critical to successful websites. An example of testing is when OPA designed, conducted and reported on usability for the County's financial transparency application to ensure that those who are not familiar with the County's financial structure would still be able to search and obtain the information they want. Findings and subsequent changes made the product more effective and efficient.

Emergency Information

OPA uses the web as one way to communicate critical information during emergencies. In recent years, information has been published online for the Derecho, Tropical Storm Sandy, numerous snow/ice events and other storm and health-related events. OPA web staff is available at any hour to publish critical information.

Policy

OPA, in consultation with the E-Government Steering Committee and DIT, provides the policy framework for the County's web content as outlined in Procedural Memorandum No. 13-04.

Benefits

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media growth, as outlined with the metrics on the first page of this description, has expanded each year as more people use social media; as the County selectively approves more accounts; and as government culture becomes more comfortable with social media.

Five years ago, it was not possible for County messages to be viewed 51 million times. In FY 2015, the collective “reach” of Facebook and “impressions” on Twitter for all official accounts reached that lofty number. The satisfaction with official social media accounts is over 80 percent. In qualitative comments, survey respondents consistently cite the abundance of useful posts Fairfax County shares on social media. The public has also provided insight that it relies on Fairfax County as a first source of information. People see the County government as publishers, much like a newspaper or broadcast journalist. With social media today, if done well and correctly, organizations such as Fairfax County can serve as a primary publisher to a community of interested people. Everyone who follows County accounts chooses to follow those accounts. People want Fairfax County government information on the tools they use today. It is indicative of the power of social media that County information was consumed 51.8 million times across two of the major social media sites in today’s communications world – a 97 percent increase from 26.3 million in FY 2014.

The benefits are also stated more starkly – if the County government exclusively relied on news releases, news conferences and media relations, then the County could not effectively tell its story directly to residents. This is a time of vast change in communications and during these tumultuous times, OPA has worked to keep the County moving forward by staying apprised of the latest tools and tactics. There is always room for improvement, but Fairfax County’s robust, detailed, centralized and methodical approach to social media has become an extremely important facet in achieving the County’s vision element of creating a culture of engagement.

WEB CONTENT

Managing web content from the countywide perspective benefits residents because OPA works to ensure that County stovepipes are not replicated on the website. While many stovepipes still exist, it is essential that a centralized office serve as the reactive and proactive content managing presence for the whole County. It is also important for staff to have resources and expertise available for consultation, which benefits agencies and ultimately, the whole County and its residents.

OPA is currently leading the countywide web content review process where OPA works with each agency individually to ensure the content on their web pages is timely, accurate and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible.

The benefits of publishing news and information directly to the community (either through web content or social media) is a clear benefit to the public because it can rely on its County government as a direct source of information. That benefit cannot be understated in a world of a million messages, distractions and niche interests. By publishing, coordinating and facilitating web content, OPA plays a critical gate keeper role to help ensure the digital presence of the County is expressed with clarity and purpose.

Mandates

While this LOB is not mandated, if the County publishes material to the fairfaxcounty.gov website, it must be in compliance with ADA accessibility requirements.

Trends and Challenges

The one, overarching trend/challenge for both social media and web content is the continued rapid growth of mobile devices. While Fairfax County has made some inroads with mobile through the leadership of DIT and OPA, County staff must recognize the fundamental change in how people consume information online – and that’s through a mobile device. According to recent research, mobile device web/app browsing exceeds visiting a website on a “traditional” desktop computer.

This trend poses a challenge to County information creators, who must think mobile first, not as an afterthought. Are County web pages designed for mobile devices or, instead, do they feature long paragraphs of information that are unfriendly to read on mobile devices? Can transactions be easily accomplished on a mobile device? Do County staff members, when proposing content for Twitter, realize that the great majority of tweets will be read on a smartphone? This overarching trend presents the challenge and OPA has an opportunity to be part of the solution when educating staff about mobile-first information presentation that needs to be executed well.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The single biggest challenge with social media is the pace of change. Tools and tactics change every week and keeping apprised of the best methods is challenging as relevant information must then be conveyed to all agency publishers. The pace of change and the introduction of new tools will not cease given the world in which we live, so Fairfax County will have to be judicious in deciding how best to grow a social media presence efficiently and effectively.

The biggest trend that is tied to the challenge above is the continued demographic breakdown of so many social media tools. One researcher recently wrote that mass marketing/communications is becoming a “mass of niches.” Popular theory today says Facebook is for people age 30+; LinkedIn is for a professional audience; Instagram is best for a younger crowd; Pinterest is generally for women; and new tools such as Snapchat appeal to even different slices of residents. It will be a challenge to stand up social profiles on all platforms deemed worthy to pursue (today the County does not have a presence on all key platforms).

OPA will continue to play its leadership role in nurturing social media while also being attentive to where we can find our audience, but it will be a challenge to support more than a handful of sites. The County’s choices in platforms must meet business goals and objectives.

WEB CONTENT

Web content faces many ongoing challenges that OPA and DIT continue to address jointly. Issues include content publishing system, ADA requirements, lack of usability testing for key sites and trying to ensure consistency across thousands of County web pages. The detailed work required to address these challenges takes time, resources and cooperation from across the County.

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Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #40: Social Media and Web Content			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$164,095	\$153,232	\$162,545
Operating Expenses	14,155	15,553	13,380
Work Performed for Others	(132,908)	(135,355)	(124,955)
Total Expenditures	\$45,342	\$33,430	\$50,970
General Fund Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$45,342	\$33,430	\$50,970
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	2 / 2.16	2 / 2.16	2 / 2.04
Total Positions	2 / 2.16	2 / 2.16	2 / 2.04

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Twitter reach (all County accounts)	NA	14,746,461	23,550,698	28,000,000	30,000,000
Facebook reach (all County accounts)	6,659,856	11,603,306	28,313,758	34,000,000	37,000,000
Facebook reach (main account)	1,644,911	2,161,533	4,478,701	5,000,000	6,500,000
Facebook reach per dedicated FTE (main account)	657,964	864,613	1,791,480	2,000,000	2,600,000
Percent satisfied with County Facebook information (main account)	80%	92%	85%	85%	85%
County YouTube minutes watched	183,136	278,726	408,656	500,000	525,000

Social media is the easiest form of communications to measure. All of the major tools the County uses include a suite of metrics behind the scenes. As the numbers in the metrics indicate, all of County social media properties are growing year over year. On Facebook, the County more than doubled its reach from 11 million in FY 2014 to 28 million in FY 2015. This number will continue to increase as more County Facebook pages are introduced and as more of our residents choose to connect with the County on social media.

Overall, the Office of Public Affairs, in its countywide leadership role for social media, fully expects all social media metrics to continue growing. More residents are finding County, police, fire, environment, animal and parks information, among the nearly 30 social accounts the County currently hosts on tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr. The County's mere presence on social media, coupled with the disciplined training OPA requires each agency to adhere to, are two factors contributing to this performance. Our residents expect us on these platforms.

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There are a few factors restricting performance. For example, on Facebook the County is at the mercy of that social media platform's algorithm, which means Facebook decides who sees what information in their individual news feeds based on hundreds of factors. So if a resident has not interacted with a County page in a while, then it is unlikely the resident will see many future updates. On Twitter, the lifespan of a tweet is generally one to two hours, so if accounts do not constantly share the same updates multiple times, then key audiences will be missed. Each social media tool has nuances that OPA stays on top of so the County can maximize its presence and relay information and engage with the community.

The County's website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov continues to be the prime information source the County directly controls and its stats have been consistent the last few years at around 19 million visits. It's a challenge to "expect" a metric on a website as large as the County's because people visit for so many different reasons; however, it is essential to note that the majority of website traffic goes to a few top areas: library, taxes, police and parks. While other areas are important, these four topics are among the most visited on fairfaxcounty.gov, primarily because of the transaction-based nature of renewing library books or paying taxes online.